

Coyote

Description:

Intelligent and adaptable, coyotes are a widespread and a well-known member of the dog family. A number of Native American tribes refer to the coyote as a trickster figure; he also appears in many legends relating to how the stars and heavens came to be.

Dog-like

Although they do hold a resemblance to dogs, coyotes have distinct characteristics. The coyote's coat ranges from tan to gray and is whitish on the underparts. A coyote has large triangular ears on the top of its head and a long, narrow muzzle. Long and lanky legs enable coyotes to reach speeds up to 40 miles per hour. The coyote has a black nose and piercing yellow eyes. Their lanky body includes a tail which is longer than they are tall!

The coyote is one of eight species of the genus *Canis*. Close relatives include the gray wolf (*Canis lupus*), the red wolf (*Canis rufus*) and all the breeds of the domestic dog (*Canis familiaris*). Telling these species apart is all in the tail! Watch a coyote's round bushy tail when it runs. The coyote runs with its tail down and between its legs. Dogs run with their tails curved up and wolves run with their tails straight out. The coyote's "howl" is much higher pitched than the wolf, and more "barky" and "yippy" than the long, low howl of the wolf. Coyotes are MUCH smaller than wolves!

Tracking a Coyote

The first thing to do when looking for any animal is to think about where it might live. Coyotes can be found in a variety of habitats including grasslands, deserts, and mountains. They make their dens in rocky crevices, logs, caves, or most often enlarge and use the dens of other animals like an abandoned den of a badger or fox. After all, why build your own house if there is already one there?

Once you find where coyotes might live, which is pretty much everywhere, how can you tell if a coyote has been there? A coyote's track measures about 2-3 inches long and about 1-3 inches wide with four distinct toes (claws showing) and a heel pad. Wolf tracks are much larger. The size of a coyote's scat varies but is usually gray-white tightly bound, twisted cigar shaped masses with fur, bones, and insect parts. Coyotes are very vocal animals and usually serenade at night using three distinct vocalizations: the bark, the yelp and the howl. These calls are used as communication to let their pack know where they are.

A Loner

The coyote does most of its hunting alone and at night. It eats both plants and animals, but mostly eats small rodents, rabbits and squirrels. Coyotes prefer to eat fresh kill but will eat carrion detected with a powerful sense of smell. In the fall and winter, the coyote often eats fruits, vegetables and berries. When hunting small prey like mice, the coyote will stand still with its legs stiff and then pounce on its prey. All you might see of a coyote in tall grass is a head popping up out of the grass.

The coyote's hearing is very acute and is used to avoid danger. Coyotes don't compete well with larger carnivores and may be killed by them. Coyotes avoid areas and habitat occupied by these species to avoid conflict. When coyotes do come into contact with a threat, the tail displays threat by becoming bushy and is held horizontally when the coyote displays aggression.

Reproduction and Offspring

The coyote mates between February and April. The female may mate with more than one male. The female can give birth to between one and nineteen pups two months after mating though the average litter size is usually around six to seven. The pups are born blind with floppy ears but open their eyes in about ten days. The coyote pups will begin to venture out of their den when they are three to four weeks old and are weaned when they are 5-7 weeks old. They begin to eat solid food at 3 weeks when the caregivers regurgitate food that has already been chewed and broken down. As pups grow up, they eventually end up dispersing from the pack when access to food becomes limited. Occasionally, coyotes will even interbreed with the common dog.

Range/Distribution

Once, the coyote was only associated with the West, but now, coyotes are found in all parts of the United States except for Hawaii. They are also found in Mexico, Central America and most of Canada. With an extremely varied range that has adapted to humans, coyotes are now present in some cities.

Management Status in Idaho Predatory Wildlife

They may be taken in any amount at any time and in any manner not prohibited by state or federal law by holders of the appropriate hunting or trapping license.



Coyote
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Footprint

No Map

Distribution Map

1. **Species:** Coyote
2. **Scientific Name:** *Canis latrans*
3. **Population:**
4. **Size:** Weight: 25-45 lbs.
Height (at shoulder): 18-20 inches.
Length (with tail): 40-60 inches.
5. **Diet:** Mostly small rodents, rabbits, & squirrels, but also birds, snakes, carrion, and berries.
6. **Young:** 6-7; called pups.
7. **Lifespan:** 8-12 years.
8. **Taxonomy:** Kingdom: Animalia
Phylum: Chordata
Class: Mammalia
Order: Carnivora
Family: Canidae
9. **Hunted In Idaho:** Yes
10. **Hunting Link:**